

Transcript for February 10, 2026, City Council Meeting

Update on RFPs for development on parking plazas 1, 2, 3, and a tentative project schedule. (Informational Item)

YouTube Meeting Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JWUt8aEPTE>

Starts: minute 55:00 Ends: 1:12:38 (Duration: 17:38 minutes)

Staff Report: <https://www.menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/2/agendas-and-minutes/city-council/2026-meetings/20260210/20260210-city-council-regular-agenda.pdf>

COUNCILMEMBER DISCUSSION

Councilmember Combs:

I wanted to share my general feedback and thoughts as it relates to the timeline in connection with the development of the downtown parking lots.

- I generally am opposed to the idea of Council giving, direction on a particular proposal before, the election.
- (and) obviously (I am) opposed to the idea of staff writing a staff report to ask for Council to give a direction or a recommendation.
- I think at the end of the day, the referendum will pause the process. That's just part of what I think is clear. And so, accepting that it must pause the process, I feel that it creates unnecessary, resentment for the city to proceed as if the referendum is not an issue. It doesn't bias anything to pause, because we're going to have to pause anyway. But what I think (about) the Council proceeding to a position of providing direction is it engenders a lot of ill will, leading up to an election, and unnecessary ill will.
- And so, I just wanted to make it clear, I see it to be another clear misstep by the council to go in that direction. Ultimately, nothing can happen here until there's some clarity as it relates to the referendum. And nothing will happen unless, to be clear, the referendum fails. And I think what the voters should be making a decision on is the option of a proposal, and not a specific proposal. The other thing that happens is if the council makes a proposal, then the election becomes about that proposal. And I think that's not what it should be about. I think it should be about this option, and the option should remain, across the three proposals that we have until there is some clarity from the voters that they want Council to retain the authority to repurpose the lots.
- So, again, I wanted to make my thoughts clear on that, since it is outlined in the staff report to have the staff provide a recommendation and have the Council give direction.

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Councilmember Nash:

I will state, (an) opposite opinion, which is, I think it's very important for us to continue on this path, fully realizing that any, decision by the voters will certainly impact the... if the... if the referendum wins, then, Menlo Park: it's absolutely... will... the city will need to backtrack, and I think that, as is outlined in the report, that, (as) each step will be taken, we will take one step at a time as we move down this process, but, I believe that there is, a lot of reasons to move forward. I have heard from numerous people who are very happy that we are moving forward. I've heard from other people who are very unhappy that we are moving forward. But I think that given I think that staff has outlined, a very reasonable, very transparent process.

Councilmember Combs:

I mean, I'll just add, like, and accept that. I think that there will have to be a conversation with HCD, no matter what. So, I mean, this, this idea that somehow there is, there is some, timelines with real consequences, I think doesn't make sense, to be honest with you. HCD is not incentivized to enact some sort of nuclear option, one, because there isn't really time between now and the November election, and what does that get you? What does that achieve for them or for us? It's a process which voters in California can avail themselves of. The voters in Menlo Park have, and so we, as members of government, whether it's at the state level or at the local level, I think must let that process play out. If the council is proceeding, then obviously, it's the decision of a majority of the council. I have expressed my concerns, but it doesn't achieve anything, as far as keeping to some timeline. The timeline is not real, to be honest, because there's already going to need to be a pause. And again, (proceeding) engenders, like, a lot of ill will that's unnecessary as we come up on what will be an incredibly divisive election.

Councilmember Schmidt.

Yeah, I think I want to react as well, more in agreement with the mayor, because I think there's a lot of speculation that the timelines aren't real. As I understand. The milestones and the way the process works, we're already a couple of years behind on this part of it. (The election) that's 10 months away, so to say that any agency like HCD, would ignore another year of being behind and not start some kind of a process, I think that's speculation, and that's just my personal opinion, so I'm not willing to reduce our safety zone buffer of decertifying the housing element, and take that risk for 10 months if we can take steps to continue to hit our milestones. I think I'm going to feel differently when it comes to Menlo Park making firmer commitments, but I... I feel like putting this off for

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another 10 months, if I was in HCD's position, I would react to that. But we're all just speculating, But what would be your reaction? I'm not speculating. Is it reality that HCD would decertify our housing between now and November? I think that's a possibility.

Councilmember Combs

I don't think that's a possibility at all. Friendly people can disagree, right? Is there any example you can present where HCD has decertified a housing element as an issue, a deliverable as it relates to that housing element, was going to be on the ballot in the months ahead? (There is) not a single example of them acting in that way. of decertifying a housing element, of taking the steps to decertify a housing element. It is not a sort of, you know, edict that just happens. It's a process. That takes lots of time. And so, again, we're talking about, like, November. The idea that there would be some substantive... I think it's fine, we can have different opinions and beliefs, but I do think it's... I must be straight with the residents in Menlo Park and say, let's look at the history, let's look at the facts, let's look at the logic on the ground. And the idea that there would be some substantive action taken by the state agency between now and the November election, that one sort of pulls back the city's planning authority, decertifies the housing element in some way, doesn't comport with logic.

Councilmember Schmidt

- I think we're both speculating, right? Until we understand the process and HCD has a chance to weigh in in a definitive way, and until we get a read, then we're both guessing, right? So, I think that's my only point.

Councilmember Nash:

I guess I would add one other piece, and that is I actually think it's very valuable for residents and business owners and businesses, to Menlo Park: see what this would look like, and hear from the various developers, hear what, go through the process which has been outlined, which is actually have a community feedback forum, and learn more about these projects, because I think that, people will -may - react differently. It may, sway some people. Some people may think it's better, some people may think it's worse, but I think more information is a benefit, regardless of the HCD piece. I just think the more information people can have, learn about what they're voting on, learn about what actually is being proposed, learn about what's possible, what about the funding, all of this is... are all pieces of information that will go into a voter's decision.

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Councilmember Combs

- I had promised myself I wouldn't say anything else, but I just don't want my opinion to be construed. What I said was (I am) opposed to the Council giving clear direction on a proposal. I was not opposed to the collection or presentation of information about the projects or proposals. I am very supportive of, and historically, I have said I am supportive of that, so people could have some idea of what they are voting for or against. So, again, very much supportive of the idea of the presentations before Council, even a study session on this item. Again, what I object to is Council taking action and providing clear direction about a singular proposal, but very much supportive of all information being provided, as it relates to these proposals.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

I'm Tony Drager, I live in Menlo Park. I vote in the elections, and I, have been here for 50 years. Been in business at Draeger Supermarkets for more than that, working as a bagger, a checker, a stock clerk. And I'd like to see that business continue. I feel without parking lots, we won't continue as a good business. We commit ourselves to function as a democracy. That's what we commit ourselves to in this country. We have a process has certain parameters and, we work within those parameters. And when those parameters are usurped, You create a sentiment of distrust and a questioning of motives.

That's not what I'm here to say. I'm here to ask you to let that process go, and work. We put a proposition on the ballot. It's supposed to be voted on by the public. And I ask you to put off any of these decisions on these parking lots until that election is held, and the people speak. Maybe the people will want developments in those parking lots. But maybe not. But your job is to let them speak. Not to try to do something behind the back, ahead of time, to prevent the process. Thank you.

I'm Karen Grove. I live in Menlo Park as well, and I vote in Menlo Park, too. I'm speaking, just to say thank you. I really appreciate that we are moving forward with the proposal to build hundreds of deeply affordable homes on our downtown surface parking lots, while also Improving downtown parking, the pedestrian and biking access, beautifying it with little parklets and paseos. I'm really, really excited after reading the three proposals. And I appreciate the timeline that was put out with all the different steps. I look forward to the very first one, which would be an open house where everybody in the community can come

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and see displays of what each developer has in mind, and can ask questions and make suggestions. And then, you know, it goes from there. And I appreciate our public processes. I definitely believe that ideas improve when they are informed by multiple perspectives. And the process that we have now allows for that, and allows for it Karen Grove In a very public and transparent and governed way. And I appreciate that, so I'm really glad that we're moving forward, because housing delayed is housing denied, so anything we can do to, reduce the delay is much appreciated. So, thank you, and have a good evening.